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May 3, 2021

Senator Craig Hickman, Chair  
Representative Michael Sylvester, Chair  
Members of the Labor and Housing Committee

**RE: Testimony in Qualified Support of LD 1564, An Act To Amend the Laws Governing  
Unemployment Compensation  
Testimony in Opposition to LD 1571, An Act To Strengthen the Unemployment Insurance  
System To Better Serve Maine Workers**

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee:

My name is Curtis Picard and I am the President and CEO of the Retail Association of Maine. I am a resident of Topsham. We have more than 350 members statewide and represent retailers of all sizes. Maine's retailers employ more than 85,000 Mainers.

We are here today to speak in qualified support of some of the thoughts and ideas presented in LD 1564, and we do this with the hope that all parties can have input and eventually help make the unemployment insurance system better for employers and employees. We also appreciate the time that Commissioner Fortman and Ms. Boyette of the Maine Department of Labor spent with us to help explain LD 1564 and what they are looking to accomplish. Over the last fourteen months, a number of people accessed Maine's unemployment system, and that has prompted some discussions over the program and how it can be changed or improved.

LD 1564 does make a number of changes to unemployment compensation, and after speaking with representatives of the Department of Labor, it is our belief that some changes in unemployment are probably due to be updated and addressed. However, we also need a better understanding of the cost to the system and we have concerns about adding additional costs to the system until we are fully past the current pandemic.

Having said that, we do think that with the number of these bills, in particular LD 1571 which is proposing some very dramatic changes to Maine's system, it might be prudent and helpful if there was a vehicle carried over where all stakeholders could have a comprehensive discussion about the needs of both employers and employees. Maine is a state where reasonable people

can come together and address the needs of businesses and the people they employ in both good times and in times like the recent situation which tested us all.

Since the schedule came out last week and these hearings were scheduled, we are testifying in qualified support of LD 1564. This is not to diminish in any way the attributes in LD 1020, 1032, and 1260. We are still assessing the costs and impacts to our members on Speaker Fecteau's bill LD 1571. The Speaker's bill makes a number of changes such as the alternate trigger and the total extended benefit amounts in high unemployment period, which we believe could have had significant implications in the recent pandemic.

Those are our comments on these UI bills, and again, we would sincerely hope that with time to address these issues we could come out with legislation that works for both employers and employees.

I thank you for your time and I'd be happy to answer any questions or provide any additional information you may need.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts.

Sincerely,

Curtis Picard, CAE  
President and CEO